



Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.626
26 May 2000

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 626th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 22 May 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. OUEDRAOGO

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GE.00-42430 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Second periodic report of Norway (continued) (CRC/C/70/Add.2; HRI/CORE/1/Add.6; CRC/C/Q/NOR/2; written replies of the Government of Norway to the questions raised in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Norway resumed places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. KARP reiterated her earlier question about whether the Government of Norway would consider moving towards a system in which the views of children under 12 were taken into account when the children were capable of expressing them. Such a change would require a change in legislation and attitudes. She also asked whether groups existed in Norway aimed specifically at promoting the participation of children in local decision-making.
3. Mr. WILLE (Norway), referring to a comment by Mr. Doek, said that the issue of the anonymity of sperm donors was to be examined within the context of the Plan of Action for Human Rights.
4. When unaccompanied minors requested asylum in Norway, the extent to which they needed protection was assessed according to general criteria contained in the Immigration Act, which stated that the law was to be applied in accordance with Norway's international obligations, if those obligations were such as to strengthen the position of the person requesting asylum. If asylum was not granted, a residence permit was often issued on humanitarian grounds if the child's return to his or her country of origin was not considered advisable. Concerning unaccompanied minors Norway followed the guidelines of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which stated that children should not be returned to their country of origin if the person responsible for their care could not be traced. Since it was often difficult to find the carer, most unaccompanied minors were given permission to stay in Norway. A debate was currently going on in Norway as to how to improve the success rate in tracing the carers of unaccompanied minors.
5. Various sources were used to assess the situation in the child's country of origin, including the embassy of the relevant country and, in some cases, the refugee attaché at the embassy; delegations from the immigration authorities who visited the countries of origin; regional advisers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration; information and advice from UNHCR and local, national and international NGOs.
6. In reply to a question by Ms. Mokhuane about stateless children, he said that stateless people were encouraged to contact the authorities in their country of origin only if it was likely that they could have normal contact with those authorities. That was not usually the case if refugee status was granted. The written replies stated that, as at 1 January 1999, there had been 195 stateless children in Norway. The number had decreased since then because some had acquired the citizenship of their country of origin through the relevant embassy.

7. Ms. VINNES (Norway), replying to a question by Mr. Doek, said that, pursuant to the Children Act, any person over the age of 18 had the right to bring a paternity case before the courts in order to establish the identity of his or her biological father. Persons under 18 were entitled to request the appointment of a provisional guardian to bring a paternity case on their behalf.

8. Regarding Ms. Mokhuane's question on the school subject of Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education, she emphasized that one of the basic principles of the Norwegian education system was that schools should be open to all, without distinction on grounds of religion, ethnic origin or social background, and that all pupils should be taught the same subjects. Upon request of the parents, children could be exempted from certain activities at school if those activities were clearly of a religious nature. The future content of the subject of Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education was to be determined pending the presentation of a report by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs later in the year. The Norwegian Humanist Association and the Islamic Council had brought charges against the Norwegian State over the introduction of the new subject, claiming that it breached the principle of freedom of religion. They had lost their case in the court of first instance but had decided to take it to the Court of Appeal.

9. The question of separation of Church and State was currently the subject of public debate in Norway, partly inspired by the fact that such a separation had recently occurred in Norway's neighbouring country, Sweden.

10. Mr. HELLAND (Norway), replying to a question by Ms. Mokhuane, said that some of the media and a right-wing party in Norway were keen to highlight criminal behaviour by immigrant children and young people. However, statistics showed that those groups did not commit more crime than young people born in Norway, although the level of violent behaviour was higher among young immigrants. The previous Government had submitted a report to Parliament on crime among children and young people, which was to be discussed in June 2000. One of the proposals in the report was to step up efforts to combat bullying in schools. A project with that aim had been established in Bergen and was to be extended to other municipalities the following year. It had led to a significant reduction in bullying in the test area. Other projects had been introduced to help children with serious behavioural problems: Parent Management Training was aimed at small children and Multisystemic Therapy was aimed at older children. Research had begun on how to deal with the problem of gangs of young criminals and other work was under way to help immigrant children and young people who had suffered experience of war.

11. Regarding Ms. Karp's question about the age at which children's views could be heard, he said that, although 12 was the age at which it became compulsory to take the views of the child into account, children under that age were also given the chance to express their views in some circumstances. In child custody cases, an expert was appointed to assess the best interests of the child, partly by listening to the views of the child in question. A system of child's spokespersons was also used in order to ensure that the views of very small children were taken into account. The Youth Forum for Democracy was made up of expert groups that promoted the participation of children in decision-making at the local level. More than half of the municipalities in Norway were covered by such a group.

12. Ms. MOLLESTAD (Norway), replying to a question by Ms. Rilantono, said that women made up over 50 per cent of university and college students. However, relatively few women chose to study science and technology, and the Government was taking measures to encourage female students to make informed subject choices without being influenced by traditional gender roles. For example, money had been allocated from the State budget to fund a national centre for natural sciences and mathematics which aimed to encourage girls to study those subjects. Positive results were being achieved in that area, particularly at the university level: the number of women studying biology and chemistry had increased following an active policy to recruit women to those subjects. However, in other subject areas such as mathematics and physics, the number of female students remained low. In secondary education, the pattern of subject choices by girls and boys had not yet shown any positive change and research was being conducted on that issue. It was increasingly recognized that, in order to change traditional perceptions of "male" and "female" subjects at secondary level, it was necessary to begin challenging those perceptions at the level of primary education. The Government was therefore taking measures to place greater emphasis on mathematics and science in training for primary school teachers.

13. Ms. HELLERUD (Norway), replying to a question by Mr. Doek, said that the Committee's concluding observations on Norway's initial report had been communicated to all the relevant ministries and had been taken into account in the drafting of the second periodic report. Paragraphs 132 to 134, in particular, contained specific references to them.

14. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions to the delegation concerning family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities and special protection measures.

15. Ms. EL GUINDI asked what measures had been taken in Norway to integrate disabled children into society and ensure that they had contact with other children. She would also like to know what the legal status of abortion was, particularly with regard to teenage girls.

16. Mr. DOEK asked whether joint custody of children usually continued after parents divorced or whether one parent was generally granted sole custody. He would also like to know whether there were other means of enforcing visitation rights besides the coercive fee mentioned in the report.

17. Noting that 80 per cent of children separated from their parents by child welfare services were placed in foster care and the remaining 20 per cent in institutions, he asked whether specific guidelines were used when making a decision about placing a child in alternative care. According to reports from NGOs, there were differences in intervention practices in different areas of the country; did that mean that there were no national standards for intervention in family life in cases where the child's development was threatened? If not, what was the explanation for those regional differences? He would also appreciate further information about the procedure for reviewing foster care placements, including who was responsible for conducting such reviews. He asked whether the child welfare services were under pressure to continue considering the return of the child to his or her own family. In addition, he would like to know whether provision was made for consulting children in care when decisions were taken to move them from one institution to another. If the child did not agree with the decision, did he or she have the right to appeal against it and to receive legal assistance for such an appeal?

18. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELA said she had learned that the budget allocation to local authorities had fallen by Nkr 132 million in the fiscal year 1999. She asked the delegation whether or not that was so, in view of its previous statement that the budget allocation had not been reduced.

19. She would like to know how many Roma and Travellers there were in Norway and what language the Travellers spoke. She would also like to know whether there was any provision for Roma children in schools, such as teachers with knowledge of the Romany language and school books in the language. She asked whether Norway had ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

20. Ms. MOKHUANE asked whether children were entitled to a periodic review of their placement in institutions, as stipulated in article 25 of the Convention. Was there a system to ensure that all institutions where children were placed were inspected regularly? According to information at her disposal, since the entry into force of the Act relating to child welfare services in 1993, the number of cases of children in placement had risen. What was the explanation for that increase? Had any measures been taken to facilitate contact between children and their parents in prison, for example by extending visiting rights to include weekends? If, as the Committee had been informed, weekend visits were not possible owing to manpower constraints, the Government might consider taking on extra staff for that purpose.

21. Ms. EL GUINDI, noting that 70 per cent of adoptions involved children brought to Norway from other countries, asked whether the law permitted the adoption of foreign children if the identities and whereabouts of their parents were known.

22. Ms. KARP said that, in her understanding, the evaluation of the child welfare system had been due for completion in May 2000. What had been its conclusions, and had they been put into practice? There was currently a shortage of places in day-care centres, and according to the written replies the former Government had postponed to 2002-2003 the date on which places would be made available for all children. In the interim, the cash benefit scheme mentioned in paragraph 277 of the report appeared to be an attractive alternative to early childhood education in day-care establishments and one which allowed children to stay home with their parents. On the other hand, it had been found that early socialization of the kind found at day-care centres and kindergartens was an important factor in child development. An evaluation of the cash benefits scheme, which had begun in 1998, was due to be completed in 2001. Did that mean that an entire generation of children would be deprived of early childhood education?

23. There was reportedly a high level of stress in the education system, with a lack of time devoted to recreation. A relatively large number of students complained of disorders such as headaches. The Government had referred in the written replies to a programme drawn up by Professor Dan Olweus to reduce the incidence of bullying. Had the Government adopted the aims of that programme for all Norwegian schools?

24. Mr. RABAH requested information about placement of children in foster homes. According to the report, placement was carried out in cooperation with the child's parents or, for children over 15, with the children themselves. Was the opinion of children under 15 taken into account? The Committee had been told that the biological parents continued to have

responsibility for such children and were allowed to visit them. What was the children's legal status? Were they adopted by the foster families, and under what conditions? Did they have the right to refuse placement or adoption? Did a mechanism exist to monitor the adoption procedure in order to avoid abuse of any kind by the foster families?

25. According to information received by the Committee, about 6 per cent of the teaching staff in Norway were not qualified, and in some towns that proportion rose to over 65 per cent. Were those statistics accurate? The Government had reported that the objectives for compulsory schools and kindergartens must be based on values of universal human rights rather than specific religious beliefs. Had there been debate on that issue, with some Norwegians supporting the latter?

26. Ms. RILANTONO, noting the statement in paragraph 214 of the periodic report that medical consultations for children over the age of 7 were not free, asked how the medical insurance scheme worked. In considering Norway's initial report the Committee had made a suggestion with regard to single parents and the Government had said that further studies would be carried out. Could the delegation provide information on the situation of single parents and benefits available to them?

The meeting was suspended at 3 55 p.m. and resumed at 4 05 p.m.

27. Mr. WILLE (Norway), replying to Ms. El Guindi, said that under Norwegian law the decision to have an abortion was taken by the woman alone, regardless of age. In reply to a question by Mr. Doek, he said that the Children's Act of 1981 stipulated that parents who were married had joint parental responsibility, and that separated or divorced parents could agree that they would share parental responsibility or that one would take sole responsibility. If the parents were not married, the mother automatically had sole parental responsibility, unless the parents together notified the national population register that they wished to have joint parental responsibility or that the father should have sole responsibility. Legal procedures existed to resolve disagreements concerning parental responsibility and also concerning the child's place of residence.

28. He could not provide up-to-date information on the Roma population in Norway, but some years earlier it had been estimated that about 400 Roma were Norwegian citizens. No textbooks in the Roma language were used in schools, and to his knowledge the language was not taught in the public schools, although it was taught privately. Norway had ratified the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the Government was working on a report to Parliament on national minorities in Norway. The main basis for determining whether children should be allowed to visit their parents in prison was the concept of the best interests of the child. According to the Children's Act, the child was entitled to have access to both parents. Under the prisons legislation visits by children from age 3 to 14 were limited, out of consideration for the best interests of the child. Inmates at "closed prisons" were allowed to telephone up to 20 minutes per week, and those at "open prisons" had no limitations on telephone calls. A system of leaves of absence existed, whereby prisoners could return to their families for short periods. Persons who had served a third of their sentences were allowed 18 to 30 days of leave per year, and the Ministry of Justice had proposed extending the rights to leave of absence and telephone contacts for prisoners who had children.

29. Mr. HELLAND (Norway) said that it was generally accepted that foster homes were the best alternative care solution. There were currently about 1,000 children in child welfare institutions and approximately 4,000 in foster homes. The municipalities issued recommendations concerning placement, and the county social welfare boards were ultimately responsible for deciding whether a child should be placed in an institution or a foster home. There were two kinds of institutions: one for normal children, and one for children who were especially violent or prone to criminal behaviour, where the use of force or restraint was allowed. Such institutions should be inspected eight times per year by the County Governor's Office, although many were visited less frequently owing to a lack of resources. Most research suggested that it was not desirable for violent children or children who had committed offences to be institutionalized, as young criminals placed together in groups tended to teach one another about crime and reduce the chances of rehabilitation. The Government therefore stressed the use of alternatives such as multisystemic therapy, which had proven much more effective than institutionalization.

30. There was no national standard for the removal of children from their parents' custody, as it would be extremely difficult to establish such a standard. However, it was clear that placement was resorted to more often in Norway than in other countries. In all cases the main criterion was the best interests of the child. Children were taken from their parents when it was determined that they were subjected to suffering, for example if the parents were drug addicts, child abusers or otherwise unable to care for them. When a child was placed in foster care, a plan was drawn up and periodically updated with a view to returning the child to the biological family. After a certain period the plan could be modified, as a child who had stayed for an extended period in a foster home might be better off remaining there than returning home. Many municipalities should do more to assist parents who lost custody of their children because they were not competent to care for them and to support foster homes. In reply to a question by Ms. Tigerstadt-Tahtela, despite the Committee's information he was certain that allocations to local authorities had not decreased, but had in fact risen. He did not have exact information but would be happy to send precise figures later.

31. Concerning adoption, the Government followed the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, and would not permit the adoption of a foreign child if that child's biological parents were alive and could be identified. However, in certain exceptional cases involving illness of the parents, a relative in Norway had been permitted to adopt the child.

32. Replying to a question by Ms. Karp, he said the committee appointed by the former Government to evaluate the child welfare system had issued a report in early May 2000 containing many suggestions for improvement. The main suggestion was to place more emphasis on parental abilities, in order to help parents who encountered difficulties to keep custody of their children. The report, which was based on research financed by the Ministry of Family and Child Affairs, was to be sent to all municipalities and organizations for comment, after which the Ministry would decide whether to amend the legislation or take other measures. The cash benefit scheme had been the subject of a vast political debate, and the Labour Party, which was currently in power, was very much against that programme for many of the reasons raised by Ms. Karp. The new Government would no doubt invest in the construction of

pre-school facilities so as to ensure that sufficient space was available by 2003. However, the Government would probably not change the cash benefit scheme in the immediate future, as a majority in Parliament favoured maintaining it.

33. It was the Government's objective to make schools more "child-friendly". There was room for improvement in that regard, through active participation by parents, teachers and children themselves.

34. Regarding foster placement, he said that in some cases parents were deprived of their parental rights and the child given up for adoption. However, it was common for children to remain in foster homes without being adopted. The foster home was considered the child's new home but the parents retained parental responsibility and were consulted on important matters such as education or religion.

35. With regard to the percentages of unqualified teachers cited by Mr. Rabah, it was true that a number of teachers had not completed formal teacher training. However, he did not believe that most of them were totally unqualified. In any event, the Government's aim was to provide all children with fully qualified teachers.

36. Ms. HELLERUD (Norway) pointed out that information about the participation of disabled children in the social life of their local communities was contained in the written replies. The goal of the State was to provide every disabled child with the opportunity to participate. Special measures were in place for disabled children in early childhood establishments and schools. However, research had shown that integration had been more successful with younger children than with teenagers. Reintegration of older children with disabilities, therefore, remained a challenge for the Government.

37. Mr. WILLE (Norway) said that legal provisions existed for recovering maintenance from delinquent fathers. Replying to Ms. Rilantono, he said the increasing number of home births was attributable to a rise in the popularity of the practice rather than a lack of municipal facilities. Municipalities were required to offer home birth services.

38. Ms. MOKHUANE asked whether the national follow-up plan to the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had been adopted and what progress, if any, had been made in that regard. The report mentioned the existence of several programmes for children with learning disabilities but lacked information on the situation of children with psychiatric problems. Apparently, the waiting lists for treatment were extremely long and children in need of specialized care were shunted from psychiatric services to welfare services. What was being done to prevent that practice, given that welfare workers were not necessarily equipped to deal with such cases? The problem was compounded by a shortage of psychiatrists and she wondered whether that was also being addressed.

39. It would also seem that the children of parents who were psychologically disturbed were not considered "at risk" and that there were no programmes to assist such children, who could be subject to high levels of stress in the family setting. She wondered whether those problems were being addressed. Turning to the question of anorexia nervosa, which the report stated was

prevalent among teenagers, she asked whether protection programmes were in place and whether the psychological aspect of the disorder was being considered in tandem with the medical side.

40. She was concerned at the percentage of disabled adolescents who were marginalized and inquired about the obstacles to their integration. She also failed to see why financial assistance was not extended to refugees with relatives living in Norway.

41. Mr. DOEK said he would welcome details on how the police were trained to deal with cases of sexual abuse and exploitation against children. Was juvenile delinquency an issue of concern in Norway, as it was in other European States? He wondered how the Government dealt with offenders under 15, the age of criminal responsibility. In addition, the fact that minors aged 15 to 17 years were treated differently from adult offenders seemed to point to the existence of a separate juvenile justice system for that age range. He wondered whether there were alternative solutions to court cases, as young offenders' criminal tendencies often became worse after they had been institutionalized.

42. Mr. RABAH said that sexual abuse against children seemed to be a serious issue in Norway, as surveys had shown that a relatively high percentage of children were exposed to sexual abuse before the age of 18. How was the Government dealing with that situation? He did not believe that the police was adequately equipped to deal with such cases and feared that victims ran the risk of encountering further problems in society if they were not offered psychological therapy. For instance, research had shown that sexually abused children often committed crimes to avenge themselves for the crimes that had been committed against them. Little information had been provided on substance abuse, child labour and street children, and comments would be welcome in that regard.

43. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELA said it would be desirable to integrate Roma children and the children of other itinerant groups into the education system with instruction provided in their mother tongue. Organizing classes for small numbers of a given language group in different schools was likely to pose problems, but she was optimistic that solutions could be found. Now that Norway had ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it would no doubt have to answer similar questions in the Council of Europe.

44. Norway had lost a number of the custody cases brought against it in the European Court of Human Rights. She had observed that Nordic countries tended to place children in alternative care when they were abused or neglected. However, the situation might be improved through education for parents in child rearing. She asked the delegation to confirm her impression that childhood-long relationships with foster parents were encouraged over returning children to their homes.

45. Ms. KARP commended Norway on its efforts to face squarely the problem of sexual abuse against children, and noted that Norway was not necessarily encountering greater problems in that area than other countries. In certain countries, some child victims of sexual abuse had not even been identified, either through the Penal Code mechanism or by welfare workers.

46. Considering the lengthiness of court cases and the fact that children could be called back to give evidence long after the abuse had been committed, and even after receiving psychological therapy, she wondered whether the Government had considered establishing a system whereby children gave evidence at the start of the trial, so that they would not have to relive their ordeal and effectively be subjected to double victimization.

47. She would welcome further information on the plan of action against sexual abuse of children and how child victims of abuse were identified. Despite the written replies, it was not clear whether an ongoing, universal programme for the treatment of victims of sexual abuse existed in Norway. According to a report by the ombudsman on the juvenile justice system, offenders over 15 were either treated as adults or not prosecuted at all, and offenders under 15 had to have displayed serious behavioural difficulties in order for welfare officers to intervene. To her mind, that suggested that children in the early stages of criminal behaviour might not benefit from a network of support or treatment, with serious implications for the future. She would welcome comments by the delegation on the ombudsman's observations.

48. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking in a personal capacity, asked how young people were involved in finding solutions and implementing programmes to eliminate bullying and violence.

The meeting was suspended at 5 15 p.m. and resumed at 5 20 p.m.

49. Mr. WILLE (Norway), replying to Ms. Mokhuane's question relating to refugees, said that no differentiation was made in assistance to refugees based on whether they had relatives living in Norway. On the training of police officers to deal with cases of sexual abuse against children, the Police Academy and the National Bureau of Investigation trained police officers in receiving complaints, interrogating suspects and gathering evidence. The academy had been seeking to improve police officers' skills in those areas since 1992. Written information could be made available to the Committee if necessary.

50. There was no separate juvenile justice system in Norway. However, provisions in the Criminal Procedure Act differentiated between persons under 18 and those over 18, the former being given shorter sentences and custodial periods. Juvenile offenders had recourse to an arbitration and mediation system.

51. Concerning a question by Mrs. Tigerstedt-Tahtela, education was provided in Finnish in the northernmost counties, if required by a minimum of three pupils. As Norway's ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the authorities were holding talks with minority groups, including the Roma in an effort to develop government policy. Only one custody case, which it had lost, had been heard against Norway at the European Court of Human Rights.

52. Mr. HELLAND (Norway), replying to Ms. Mokhuane, said Norway had prepared a national plan following the Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. It was working in close cooperation with Sweden through the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS). One project used the internet as an information tool. Norway had also earmarked funds for training seminars in the Baltic States and Russia.

53. There was a shortage of both psychiatrists and psychologists. Efforts focused on developing psychiatric services, especially for children, and the Government had allocated NKr 50 million for the training of psychiatric personnel. Since psychiatric training was a protracted process, other categories of personnel were needed to help children in need of services. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs had developed a programme providing 100 teaching hours for training personnel in municipal services to address the problem of children of psychiatric patients, which tended to be hidden in Norway. It had also developed a plan of action to help young anorexics, an important feature of which was the upgrading of professional competence.

54. As part of their effort to integrate disabled children, the authorities had allocated funds to enable NGOs to provide assistance, but had received few applications. In any event, he believed that most of the 0.5 per cent of non-integrated disabled children in the country were mentally retarded children with special needs.

55. Replying to questions by Mr. Doek and Ms. Karp, he said Norway was extremely concerned about the problem of sexual abuse. In 1993 a report on the topic had been submitted to the Storting (Parliament), accompanied by recommendations; the authorities were in the process of designing a plan. The traditional approach in Norway was to report and prosecute offenders. However, the University of Oslo was conducting a Belgian-model research programme involving the controversial approach of treating rather than punishing sex offenders, on the ground that victims were further victimized if obliged to testify in court. While the man - often the father - was in treatment, the family usually split up so that the child was removed from the source of danger. Replying to Mr. Rabah, he said that although Norway had no official sexual abuse statistics, the figure contained in the 1993 report to the Storting was approximately 5 per cent. Following one instance in which the accused had been found not guilty, the number of reported cases had declined, as families were reluctant to risk the pain involved. However, the actual situation had probably remained unchanged. Although society accepted responsibility for helping sex offenders, it was not always clear what form that help should take. Substance abuse posed a problem, especially in large cities, and was spreading throughout the country, although there had been no marked increase in recent times. Street children did not pose a serious problem in Norway. Children found roaming the streets at night were looked after by the police and the social welfare system.

56. Norway was witnessing a rise in delinquency, especially with regard to violence. Children who committed crimes posed a threat to themselves; he feared that the social welfare system did not react as early as it should, especially in Oslo. Norway's parental guidance policy focused on telling parents what they were doing right and encouraging them to develop those trends, rather than emphasizing what parents were doing wrong which had been the policy of earlier decades. To a question by the Chairperson he replied that young people were involved in action to combat crime and that some organizations received grants from the Government and from the city of Oslo to that end. In 1997 Norway had organized a Nordic conference on young people with behavioural problems and violent youth.

57. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its precise replies and invited the Committee members to ask follow-up questions.

58. Ms. KARP reiterated her earlier question about the possibility of changing the criminal law to allow child victims of sexual abuse to give evidence only at the pre-trial stage. She also wondered why treatment of offenders was envisaged as an alternative, rather than as an accompaniment, to the criminal process. Given the high rate of recidivism, treatment should begin during the prison term. She asked whether there was an infrastructure for risk evaluation of sex offenders and whether it was used in determining their punishment. Was there early release for good behaviour and, if so, what was done to protect victims from further attacks by offenders?

59. Ms. RILANTONO asked which ministries and organizations were involved in the 1995 plan of action against media-based violence begun in 1995.

60. Mr. WILLE (Norway) said that the guidelines provided for evidence to be taken from children at the earliest opportunity. There was also a risk evaluation mechanism, whereby a person serving a prison term of more than 120 days could be released, with the imposition of some controls, after serving two thirds of the sentence.

61. Mr. HELLAND (Norway), referring to risk evaluation, said research had shown that sex offenders sometimes repeated their offence and that punishment did not help. Research findings on the treatment of sex offenders were extremely disappointing. However, Norway had joined a European initiative in which experiences were compared. The Government provided funds for the Norwegian branch of Save the Children to attend the relevant seminars, after which it would decide what course of action was required. A report on the topic was expected shortly from the Nordic Council. Perhaps neighbourhoods should be informed more systematically of the imminent arrival of a released sex offender. The report to the Storting also contained measures for protecting children from violence in the media. In the introduction to the report, the authorities had stressed Norway's need for international cooperation from all countries in order to protect its children.

62. The CHAIRPERSON invited Ms. Mokhuane to present preliminary conclusions on behalf of the Committee.

63. Ms. MOKHUANE (Country Rapporteur) commended the delegation on its open dialogue with the Committee and its self-criticism. She congratulated Norway on being the first country to appoint a children's ombudsperson, its adoption of the 1995 act prohibiting female circumcision, its ratification of many human rights instruments that promoted children's rights and the useful information with which it had provided the Committee. She had been particularly cheered to learn that the Norwegian Government held the unusual view that macroeconomics did not apply to children.

64. One factor which might impede implementation of the Convention was the significant powers granted to the municipalities, which did not necessarily have the same commitment as the national Government; that could lead to disparities in funding and services to children. Another subject of concern was the fact that the general principles, including the principle of non-discrimination, did not appear to be uniformly applied across all sectors relating to the Convention. In the area of civil rights and freedoms, the Committee would welcome greater efforts regarding the nationality and status of non-Norwegian children.

65. While the Committee had been informed of the incidence of child suicide, more needed to be done to discover its causes, and, as the delegation had agreed, there was a need for more psychiatrists and psychologists and for upgrading of social-worker training. She urged the delegation to ensure that Norway's second periodic report was also disseminated within the country.

66. Mr. WILLE (Norway) thanked the members for the frank dialogue with his delegation. He hoped it had succeeded in apprising the Committee of the situation of Norwegian children.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.